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## Utah to expand Gold Medal Schools program

In 5 years, it will include all pupils through junior high

By **Lois M. Collins**

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The Gold Medal Schools program is expanding to include all elementary, junior high and middle schools in the state.

The Utah Department of Health and Intermountain Health Care announced that the program will be expanded over the next five years. IHC is providing a \$1.5 million grant.

Good nutrition, physical activity and not using tobacco are the cornerstones of the program, which kicked off in Utah just before the 2002 Olympic Games. It's now in schools in 30 of the state's 40 school districts.

In making the announcement, they noted that one in four students in kindergarten through eighth grade are at an unhealthy weight.

Utah first lady Mary Kaye Huntsman helped make the announcement Thursday at Monroe Elementary in West Valley, then joined the students for a spirited "Gold Medal Mile," in this case a one-mile combination sprint/walk.

Monroe has been a Gold Medal School for the past three years and is one of an elite group that has achieved "gold-plus" status, meaning students must take part in at least 90 minutes of structured physical activity each week, faculty members have a wellness program, food is never used as a reward and recess is scheduled before lunch so that children are not encouraged to bolt down their food or skip it so they can go play.

The program is a health "success story," according to Dr. David Sundwall, director of the state Health Department. Students at participating schools have clocked more than 400,000 miles. And "kids who couldn't walk far because it was too darn hard" have been able, "with determination," to add miles, he said.

Sundwall also spoke of teachers who have stopped smoking and started exercising to be a good example to their students and their families.

IHC wanted to expand the program to all schools because "unless we start changing the conversation from our worries . . . to the actions we can take," overall health won't improve, said Dr. Tamara Lewis, medical director of IHC's community health and prevention. The program "builds healthy communities."

She said exercise, good nutrition and not smoking will reduce cases of diabetes, heart disease and other health woes.



Utah first lady Mary Kaye Huntsman, wearing white slacks, runs the Gold Medal Mile at Monroe Elementary School in West Valley City. The run was part of Thursday's announcement concerning the expansion of the Gold Medal Schools program.

*Ravell Call, Deseret Morning News*

The participating schools work with mentors to create and implement policies that promote healthy lifestyles and exercise. They are awarded bronze, silver, gold and gold-plus awards based on what they achieve, with a cash award at each level to use for physical activity, nutrition and anti-tobacco resources.

The program will begin a pilot test for junior high and middle schools in 2007 and will implement the program in selected middle schools in 2008. More information is available online at [www.hearhighway.org/gms](http://www.hearhighway.org/gms) or by calling program coordinator Sarah Rigby, 801-538-9454.